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VIRGIL *ECLOGUES* 4.49

The common phrase *auctus filio* would seem to show that *incrementum* is most naturally interpreted as "child," an increase to the family.

W. H. D. ROUSE

PERSE SCHOOL HOUSE, GLEBE ROAD, CAMBRIDGE

A LOST PLATONIC JOKE

Many of Plato's knavish speeches sleep in the unapprehending ears of his commentators. And the ponderous levity of the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philebus* is sometimes, as George Eliot might say, a great strain on the affections of his admirers. But, though modern philology may not always see or appreciate the joke, it ought at least to recognize the intention. The text by which I propose to illustrate and enforce this moral is *Politicus* 266C. Plato is there expressing his amusement at the ironical indifference of scientific classification to distinctions that reflect only the pretensions and the pride of man. In the subdivision of land animals the logic of dichotomy at one stage brackets the man and the pig. Or, as Plato puts it, humanity is paired and comes out of the race neck and neck with the sturdiest and most unfastidious (least finical) of creatures: *Τὰνθρώπινον ἡμῶν ἅμα γένος συνελήχως καὶ συνδεδραμηκὸς γένοι τῷ τῶν ὄντων γενναιοτάτῳ καὶ ἅμα εὐχερεστάτῳ.*

Jowett, outdoing the Aristophanic *ὄνον ὄρνιν*, converts Plato's pig into a bird and renders, "Human beings have come out in the same class with the freest and airiest of creatures."

An Italian scholar who retains the pig but finds no pertinency in *εὐχερεστάτῳ* emends to *εὐτρεφεστάτῳ*, "fattest,"¹ an epithet which "nobody can deny" to the pig.

My suspicions thus aroused, I found without looking farther than Liddell and Scott and Jowett's translation that Hellenists who think in English have failed to apprehend the meaning and semasiological development of *εὐχερής* and its homonyms, which have no single English equivalent. Hence this note.

The etymological fallacy switches Liddell and Scott on to the wrong track from the start: *εὐχέρεια* = *εὐχειρία*, "dexterity," Plat. *Rep.* 426D; Arist. *H.A.* 7. 10; Plat. *Leg.* 942D; cf. *Alc.* I. 122C. They relegate to a second place the passage which gives the real feeling of the word for the readers of Aeschylus and Plato, the *locus classicus* *Eumenides* 495:

πάντας ἤδη τόδ' ἔργον εὐχερεί-
α ξυναρμόσει βροτοῖς.

Commentators have rendered *εὐχέρεια* here correctly enough "license" and illustrated it by Plat. *Rep.* 391E: *πολλὴν εὐχέρειαν . . . πονηρίας*, "laxity

¹ *Bollettino di Filologia Classica*, 1911-12, pp. 53-55.

in evildoing." They recognize in this instance the analogy with *ῥαδίως*, *ῥαδιουργία*, and *ῥαδιουργός*, the man who lightly or easily enters into crime. But the further psychological development and the predominant associations of the word and its congeners in Plato escape them. The clue is "ease," not "laxity" or "license." The *εὐχερής* is the man whom the wicked or unpleasant deed costs no *Selbstüberwindung*, in the expressive German phrase. He easily overcomes the normal repugnances of moral scruples or of that taste which Plato, in anticipation of Ruskin, regards as almost the only morality. Liddell and Scott, missing the psychology, speak of this as the bad sense of the word. But *εὐχερής* may be a term of praise for the soldier or pioneer who easily puts up with the hard living and coarse fare which a spoiled and dainty palate disdains. Such, as we shall see, are the essential Platonic meanings of the word. There is at least a suggestion of them in Sophocles' *Philoctetes* 519, where Neoptolemus warns the chorus who are urging him to convey Philoctetes home in their ship:

ὄρα σὺ μὴ νῦν μὲν τις εὐχερὴς παρήης,
ὅταν δὲ πλησθῇς τῆς νόσου ξυνοσύει,
τότ' οὐκέθ' αὐτὸς τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις φανῇς.

Jebb here renders, "Thou art pliant." Liddell and Scott interpret, "accommodating, kind, yielding." And Storr translates:

See that your present kindness be not
A passing mood.

But they miss, I think, the suggestion to a Greek ear of lightly tolerating or overcoming the disgust for the odor of Philoctetes' festering wound. This is brought out in Philoctetes' words in 875:

ὦ τέκνον . . . πάντα ταῦτ' ἐν εὐχερεῖ
ἔθου, βοῆς τε καὶ δυσοσμίας γέμων;

and in 900, *δυσχέρεια τοῦ νοσήματος*. In Plato *Rep.* 439E the verb *δυσχεραίνει* is used of a similar repugnance to the horrid sight of decaying corpses, *παρὰ τῷ δημῷ*.

However it may be with Sophocles, these refinements have a direct practical bearing on the translation of Plato, as I will in conclusion show by a few startling examples. Jowett, apparently following Liddell and Scott, translates *Rep.* 426D, *οὐκ ἄγασαι τῆς ἀνδρείας καὶ εὐχερείας*, etc., "Do you not admire the coolness and dexterity of these ready ministers of political corruption?" The ironical meaning of course is, in effect: These politicians who are willing, nay, eager, to treat the maladies of such states—do you not admire them for their enterprising spirit and their readiness to rush in where philosophic statesmen fear to tread? In the words of the *Laws* 690D, Plato is *πρὸς τινα παίζων (παίζοντες) τῶν ἐπὶ νόμων θέσιν ἰόντων ῥαδίως*. Without delaying to argue what some may deem a subtlety, I pass to an indisputable case. In *Laws* 942D Plato, speaking of the preparatory military training

of youth, says καὶ δλην εὐκολίαν τε καὶ εὐχέρειαν ἐπιτηδεύειν τῶν αὐτῶν εἵνεκα. Jowett translates, "And agility and ease should be cultivated for the same object." But εὐκολίαν and εὐχέρειαν are here almost synonyms and mean the good-natured and unfastidious acceptance of the hardships described in the following loosely appositional clause introduced by τε. Similar is the meaning of the combination εὐχέρειαν καὶ εὐκολίαν in *Alc.* i. 122C, where εὐχέρεια is wrongly rendered "dexterity." Socrates tells Alcibiades that he can vie neither with Persian luxury nor, on the other hand (αἶ), with the Spartan cheerful endurance of hardship and poor fare.

Again in *Rep.* 475C Plato uses τὸν περὶ τὰ σιτία δυσχερῆ, the spoiled and dainty appetite that disdains plain wholesome food as the physical counterpart of τὸν περὶ τὰ μαθήματα δυσχεραίνοντα, the "modernist" student who picks and chooses soft electives and fastidiously rejects whatever is not obviously useful or entertaining. And to return to our pig—such a soul (535C) ἀμαθαινούσά που ἀλισκομένη μὴ ἀγανακτῇ ἀλλ' εὐχερῶς ὥσπερ θηρίον ὕειον ἐν ἀμαθίᾳ μολύνεται—it wallows in its ignorance with as little sense of repugnance (εὐχερῶς) as the least fastidious of creatures feels for the mire of its sty.

PAUL SHOREY